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NT8 Eastern Apache NT8
Chiricahua

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Chiricahua

CHIRICAHUA APACHE MATERIAL RELATING TO SORCERY

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THE major anxieties of the Chiricahua Apache Indians of the Southwest relate to sickness and to sorcery. However, since much of the sickness is explained, directly or indirectly, in terms of the use of evil power (sorcery), the greatest consternation is caused by the likelihood of attacks through baneful supernatural means.

Chiricahua Apache do not like to discuss the topic of witchcraft. Some informants who were willing to talk about anything else, even the most intimate matters, simply refused to give information on this subject. There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, to demonstrate too much knowledge of witchcraft places a person under suspicion of being a witch himself; too great a familiarity with the ways of those who "kill in secret" is considered a result of unhealthy interests or dubious practices. Also, an element of risk is involved. To speak freely about witches is to invite their attention and persecution, especially if the comments, as those of any decent Apache should be, are critical. Finally, the entire area of thought is so conducive to fear and so completely filled with unpleasant memories that the ordinary informant shrinks from exposing himself to the dreams and thoughts which are likely to follow such a discussion. Usually it is only when he is burning with indignation over some "evidence" of witchcraft or when he is in the midst of a feud with someone whom he is prepared to label a witch that the Chiricahua will express himself on this subject.

Thus the five accounts published here deal with an aspect of Chiricahua culture about which it is difficult to recover abundant material. They illustrate the Chiricahua Apache concept of the

121 plasticity of supernatural power, namely, that power may be
 754 used for good or evil depending on the character and design of
 128 the shaman. Moreover, they suggest that, according to the
 Chiricahua view, evil may arise either from the malevolence of
 man or from the advantages which evil power offers man if he
 will agree to be the instrument of the forces of malice. But it is
 plain throughout that sorcery can operate only through man and
 that consequently evil cannot flourish as long as humankind re-
 sists it courageously.

[178] The last episode is included, despite its modern elements, be-
 cause it is a good example of what takes place when new sym-
 bols are substituted for old without a change in the basic
 thought and attitude pattern.

754 1. *The Power of Sorcery Is Offered to a Chiricahua*
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A friend told me he had a chance to be a witch. This was at
 Fort Sill, Oklahoma.¹ He was sleeping in his house alone at
 night. There was a window right by him. It was dark. He
 heard somebody get in and walk around every night. He'd lock
 up carefully, but he'd hear the window and door rattle and some-
 one get in.

This thing appeared to him inside the house one night. An
 old woman and an old man came in naked and stood by his bed.²
 They were no persons he knew, just spirits. He was talking to
 them. While they were talking, a young boy and girl came in
 entirely naked and stood before him. And they told him, "We
 came over here to give you power to be a witch."

He says he talked to them. He said, "How am I going to be
 a witch?"

He told me later, "My friend, it's no wonder that when you
 suspect a witch you can't find out about him. It's right in here
 in the middle of the tongue. They told me to stick my tongue

¹ This story dates back to the time when the Chiricahua were held as
 prisoners of war at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, after being removed from their
 territory in the Southwest.

² Shamelessness, nakedness, and incest are associated with sorcery on the
 grounds that only witches would be guilty of such excesses.

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out. They had pollen and said, 'Stick your tongue out. We'll cross your tongue with pollen and then anything you say you want to happen to a person, like wanting him to be killed, will happen that way.' I said, 'Go away, leave me alone! I'm a poor man. If it doesn't do good for my people, I don't want it.' I refused it, and they all opened the door and went out. But the next day the door was locked."³

He said, "That's why a witch will say, 'All right, if I'm a witch, find it. Take it out and I'll admit it.' You'd have to take his tongue out. You can't find it on him, but it's there."

That's what he told me, but I doubt that he refused it. Some say he is a witch. Everybody knows his father was a witch.⁴

2. *The Leader Who Refused to Sacrifice a Man to His Power*

This is a story of the early days. This man was a great warrior. I've forgotten his name; my father knows it; all the old men do. This man was a great shaman in the right way, otherwise he would not have done what he did. This man was leading man of the warriors. He had charge of a big group of them. He seemed to know through his power what was going to happen.

One time his power said, "In a day or so you are going to get into action against the enemy. I have helped you in many ways with beneficial power; now you have to do it the way I want it. I want the bravest man in your group. I want you to give that man to me to be killed."⁵

³ Pollen, especially pollen of the tule, is much used by the Chiricahua in ceremonial contexts. The cross, symbolizing the four directions, also appears frequently. Power, either for good or evil, may be accepted or rejected by the individual approached. Witches are usually charged with using material objects, such as the bones and hair of the dead, in their nefarious enterprises.

⁴ This man was most indiscreet to admit that evil power had been offered to him. Witches and witchcraft are so generally and irrationally feared that even to hint of exposure to such temptation may make his friends and relatives uneasy and suspicious. If public opinion ever turns against him, his account may be distorted and used to his disadvantage.

⁵ To control much supernatural power is not always an unmixed blessing, the Chiricahua believe, for power, after helping a shaman for an extended

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He answered, "I will do no such thing!" He was a brave man himself. He got angry at his power. He said, "What were you from the beginning when you first spoke to me? I like to see my people increase in population with what power you give me to help me along. I love all my men, my warriors. They want to live in the world as long as they can. I love all these people, women and all. If you were a witch from the beginning, why didn't you tell me? I don't like witch people; I won't have witches talk to me. You promised me that it was all good for my people and myself." You didn't say that I'd have to give my people every now and then." He was arguing with his power, you see.

The power told him, "I have helped you a lot. I have gotten you out of danger and helped you in many other ways. And now I merely ask you for a man to pay for that, and you won't let me have one!"

The Apache said, "That's all right, I guess, but my habit is not that way, and I'm not going to do it. If you mean to save yourself a whole lot of trouble just take me. I love all the men. What have they to do with this power? If you want to take anyone or have anyone killed, take me."

period, may one day ask for "payment." Such payment might include a request that a relative or friend of the shaman be sacrificed. The complicity of the shaman, then, amounts to failure to warn the friend of the impending disaster or failure to use his influence over his power to dissuade it from the deed. The power works obliquely and takes its victims through sickness or during battle.

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"The shaman is hinting that this power must be evil rather than good. The Chiricahua conceive of the duality of supernatural power. Power may be used for good or for evil. In the latter case it is considered witchcraft. The impetus for the use of power for evil may come from the power itself, as in this story, or from the shaman. Sometimes a shaman will not consent to act as a tool of evil power; sometimes a source of power will desert a person "through whom it works" because that person wishes to use it in unsavory connections. For a summary of these beliefs see Morris Edward Opler, "The Concept of Supernatural Power among the Chiricahua and Mescalero Apaches," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1935, pp. 65-70 and *An Apache Life-Way*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941 pp. 242-257.

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They were talking during the day. The power said, "All right, I'll give you tonight and all day tomorrow. Tomorrow night you tell me what you are going to do."

The next day he called all his warriors and all his group together and all gathered around him. He said, "My brothers and sisters, what I have known for you people I thought was good. But at last I find out it is witchcraft. Last night I was fighting with my power. In another day or so we are going into battle. And my power told me to give up one of the very best warriors, the bravest man, the best man. I told my power, 'I will not do it. Just take me. If this ceremony is evil why didn't you tell me in the first place?' Power is angry with me, and I'm angry with him. My power told me to answer today or tonight and tell what I'm going to do."

He promised those Indians he would not do what the power requested. He said he'd rather pay the death himself. He said, "In a day or so we're going into battle. I may be killed then, for I will not give up one of my men. We've got to have this battle. We can't escape it. And I'm going to pay the death myself, but no one else will get hurt. Go ahead and fight the battle." He was a brave man.

Night came. He began to dispute with his power again. He wanted his way and Power wanted his. Finally his power said, "Well, then, I'll take you."

He said, "All right, for you're not going to have your way."

So the next morning he told the Apache again that he was not going to live more than a few days longer.

After another day or so they got into battle, so they claim. It was a hand-to-hand fight with guns, close. All the Indians fought faithfully. They killed many of their enemies. This shaman was the only man killed on their side. He was shot right in the forehead. That happened a long time ago.

3. Old Dick Cures His Friend

There was a man who had power in a different way. He, too, could heal in many ways and he performed his ceremony against

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sickness. If the sick one was witched, he would not try it but would tell to whom it was best to go to have it taken out.⁷ If it was just a matter of sickness he could do it himself.

This man, while he was in Oklahoma, was riding along. He did many things he ought not to have tried. He took out objects of witchcraft. This Apache's power warned him not to touch the witch and not to try it. He was told he was going up against a rock he could not go through. He saw a big tree in the open. The tree asked him to move it to a place he liked better. He could not do it. It was just like that. And Power showed him in another way. It showed him a mountain. He asked it to move, but it would not move. It was like that. He did not have the power to do it.

"We cannot bother witches," his power told him. But he went on and held the ceremony. He held it for two days. At the end of the two days he tried to pull it out.⁸ He was up against it. He couldn't do a thing.

His power told him, "You're going to take it out next time but you're going to give your life for that boy."⁹

So he pulled it out. But it stuck in him. And the ceremony was over. The boy got well, but in four days this man got sick.

One friend who loved him hired a very powerful man to cure him. Everybody knew this man. He was Old Man Dick. Dick sang over him for six days and couldn't get him back to his senses. Then he got very angry. The last ceremony of the seventh day and night he said, "I'm going to send my power to help the one who is going away from us, and I don't think he will go away."¹⁰ And he can have my power and we'll carry on together and do nothing but good in this world."

[7] In other words, he acted as a diagnostician in cases of witchcraft. That the Navaho had diagnosticians is well known; that they existed also among the Chiricahua and other Apache groups is less well understood.

⁸ Ahimans cured the victims of witches by extracting from their bodies objects of witchcraft which had been "shot" into them by the evildoers.

⁹ That is, he succeeded only in transferring the cause of the sickness from the boy to himself.

[15] ¹⁰ A euphemism for dying.

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The seventh night when Dick got back to his camp he got after his power. The power said, "Don't get after me for a little thing. I know what's the matter with him. I know what to do for him. He's all right. He's not going away. His power put him in trouble. He can keep that or throw it away, but he can also have me if he wants to, and he and you can practice this ceremony and do good among your people."

Then on that seventh night Dick studied it and sent his power that night. Then they saw Tuisga sitting up. He was much better. They called for Dick. He knew what it was. When he came into the house he marked the house with pollen, marked the people present, and marked Tuisga.¹¹ At daybreak Tuisga was lifted up by the power.

While this was being done Dick was praying. He prayed and prayed and said, "All present, don't become frightened. You'll see something with your eyes." Then from high up you could hear something falling. It came from the sunrise and hit the roof. The house trembled.¹² They heard an object hit on the south side. The house moved. Then from the west side an object fell. The house seemed to quiver. Then from the north side, and they thought the roof was coming off this time. All were quietly praying.

Then Dick did something else. He asked that flour gravy be brought and given to this man. Tuisga was very hungry and weak. He hadn't eaten for sixteen days.

"Now," said Dick, "I'm going to sing one song with four verses, and everybody is going to dance whether he likes it or not."¹³ And you women can call when you hear White-Painted Woman and Child-of-the-Water mentioned at the first verse.¹⁴

¹¹ Pollen, usually obtained from the cattail tule and symbolizing health, growth, and vitality, was a most sacred substance for the Chiricahua and was omnipresent in ceremonies. Marking the patient, the people, and the place with pollen is an act of blessing and purification.

¹² The Chiricahua Apache ceremonial circuit is sunwise, beginning with the east, the most important ritual direction.

¹³ The dance may function as a prayer in Chiricahua ceremonialism.

¹⁴ The ceremonial call of the women is a high-pitched ululating cry.

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755 After the fourth word Child-of-the-Water will be mentioned. At
 756 the sixth word White-Painted Woman will be mentioned. Then
 778 you dance and after the singing let him eat the gravy." Every-
 787 thing came out the way he said.
 539 Then they wanted to hear Tuisga sing. Tuisga started to
 sing himself. Tuisga said later. "Neither of us remembered one
 word of that song afterward. That was a supernatural song.
 Power was practicing it on me. I did not know it. Through it
 they were healing me."

After the ceremony everyone was glad.

I wasn't there at this time. He told me the story night after
 night, for he wanted me to be a shaman. He said, "You listen
 to this. It's worth while. And some day you will know the
 ceremony and be telling it like this."¹⁵

4. *The Witch Who Made Off With a Horse*

791 Enti was a Central Chiricahua, but he was always traveling
 778 around.¹⁶ Once he came to the camp of Old Chihuahua, the
 539 Eastern Chiricahua chief.
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Chihuahua asked him, "Have you seen any Indians on your
 way here?"

"No."

"I wonder where they are. There used to be many Indians
 all through there. Maybe they've been driven out of there. I
 hear you have power to find people and to see the enemy. Sup-
 pose you hold a ceremony for us tonight and look for us."

[538] ¹⁵ Stories concerning the acquisition of a ceremony and its successful use
 are part of the stock in trade of the shaman. In order to insure co-
 operation and respect from his patient and the on-lookers, he usually
 prefaces the ceremony proper by such accounts. For an expansion of this
 point see Morris Edward Opler, "Some Points of Comparison and Con-
 trast between the Treatment of Functional Disorders by Apache Shamans
 and Modern Psychiatric Practice," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, May,
 1936, 1371-1387. A ceremony, subject to the approval of the power which
 is its source, may be passed on by a shaman to another person, and when
 it is so transferred it is necessary that the novice hear and learn the lore
 associated with it.

[424] ¹⁶ The word *en'ti* (i nasalized) literally means "witch" or "sorcery."

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At first Enti said no. But they begged him and he agreed to do it.

That night, after dark, he started. He sang two songs. Then he stopped. He began to shake. He moved out into the brush as though he were being led.¹⁷ In a few minutes he came back.

"My power tells me that you are to stake a fat horse to the east. And on him there must be a good saddle blanket and a saddle and a gun and ammunition. I don't know why this is required. When it is done I'll have to sing more and find out."

"Has anyone got a good horse to put there?" asked Chihuahua. One young man had a fine white horse and he offered to bring it. Another brought a saddle, and soon everything that was asked for was there and the horse was staked to the east.

Then Enti started singing again. He sang two more songs. Again he began to shake. He went around the camp and then his power led him out to the west. The men sat and waited for his return. They waited a long time and still he did not come back.

"I wonder what happened to that fellow," said Chihuahua.

"I'll bet he went over to that horse," said another.

"You had better run over and see," Chihuahua told him.

The man ran over there and, sure enough, the horse was gone.

When Enti got away with this horse he headed for Natuzzi. He came to the encampment of Cochise.¹⁸ Enti had some kind of love ceremony and they say he had that whole camp crazy. He got away with six women. Then he heard that Cochise was after him and he ran off again. He came to Hot Springs country where my family lived. But Cochise and a group of men came after him. Cochise was a real fighter and not many stood out against him. They caught Enti at Hot Springs and

¹⁷ In ceremonies to locate the position of the enemy or to find lost objects, the power is expected to move the outstretched arm or the body of the shaman in the proper direction.

¹⁸ Cochise was the leader of the Central Chiricahua band. His son, Naiche, co-operated with Geronimo in the Indian War of 1886 which ended in the surrender of Geronimo to General Nelson A. Miles and the exile of the entire Chiricahua tribe from the west for 27 years.

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791 they tied him up, hung him up in the sun so he couldn't move.
539 They were going to kill him there.

But some of the Hot Springs people asked Cochise about it. They wanted to know why he was treating this man like this; they wanted to know what Enti had done. Enti was sweating there in the sun and he was all cramped up from the way he was tied. "Kill me if you are going to and have it over," he told Cochise.

"Never mind, we'll take care of you when we're good and ready," Cochise told him and went off with some of the Hot Springs people, explaining what Enti had done over in his country.

While Cochise was away telling these things to some of the Hot Springs men, my father came along. He had been drinking and was feeling pretty happy. He saw Enti hung there, twisting and suffering from the heat. He took his knife and cut the ropes. Enti jumped on a horse and got away again. This was the time he came to Mescalero country. Cochise was certainly angry when he found out Enti was gone. But he was afraid to get after my father, for my father had many friends there.

Enti was finally killed at Mescalero. He made many enemies. Every time he got drunk he would tell someone, "I'm a witch and I'm going to kill you." So one time they killed him.¹⁹

He knew that Enti was his name. They called him that right to his face.²⁰

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5. *The Man Who Signed Up With the Devil*

It's a very nasty thing I heard about a certain man. This happened about 1913, the spring of 1913, twenty years ago this month. Everybody says this fellow is a witch. He got sick

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¹⁹ There is considerable evidence that there were Chiricahua Apache who believed that they could harm or kill fellow tribesmen whom they disliked by means of supernatural power and who made threats and boasts concerning such activity, usually when under the influence of intoxicants.

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²⁰ A Chiricahua will address a person by name only in anger or in an emergency situation. The implication here is that this man was occasionally called by this unsavory name in anger.

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toward spring sometime, and he pretty near died. It was pneumonia, I think. He told the story to others, and they spread it all right. 787 539

He was unconscious and out of his mind. He was out of his mind, but he wasn't dreaming. His relatives thought he was going to die. When he was out of his mind, he was somewhere else, as he told the story. He said afterward, "I saw the place where the dead people go. I was on a high mountain. On the side of the mountain there was grass, yucca, and rocks." His relatives were crying that he was going to die. He was already out of his mind and in the other place they said. 787 775 539

He said he felt that he was dying, and all at once he opened his eyes. He was sitting there and then he began to slide. He grasped the grass. He saw a big shoot down there." He was part way in, just hanging on the edge.

Something said, "Look down there; that's where all the dead people are."

This man said, "I looked down there and saw all kinds of beasts down there. It's a big round cave. It's dark down there, but after while I saw bones. The animals, lions and others, were just waiting for me to fall." It's very, very peculiar, but it's the way he told it a few months before we came to Mescalero. He looked down and was holding on to the edge. The voice said, "Those are dead people's bones; those animals eat up the flesh." 22

He did not yet know who was speaking to him. He just heard a voice. And he could hardly keep from sliding in there. It was a deep pit, nothing but solid rocks.

The voice said, "Look at me."

This man said, "I looked up. There was the Devil standing [776]

²¹ The aboriginal Chiricahua belief is of an underworld which the dead reach by falling through a hole in the earth's crust onto a cone of sand below.

²² The punishment of the dead in the afterworld is an idea traceable to Christian doctrines. The aboriginal Chiricahua conception of the underworld pictured a land of plenty and contentment, with no judgment of the departed. [777]

787 with horns and a tail with spears on; a red Devil, and every time
796 he spoke, fire came out of his mouth.²³ The Devil told me,
539 'There's only one way you can be saved. You have to promise
[195] me that you'll be a faithful worker for me. Are you going to
do it? If you say no, you're going to fall straight down and go
to those beasts.' "

Then he replied, " Yes, I promise you I'll be a faithful worker
for you if you will let me live in the world once more."

The man said, " All at once the Devil says, ' All right, stand
up on the bank,' and he disappeared for a while. And then came
the Devil with a high table and a big book and red ink. And
he put the table there, and the book there, and I was standing
right there. And he commenced to open the book, all written
with red ink. He said, ' You see those men living here. Those
are my men. They are living on earth. They are signed up with
me already.' He kept turning the pages and came to the list of
names. It was a big book and there were many pages to fill
still. The Devil said, ' If you promise me you will do every-
thing in this world that is wicked, if you will engage in mean
ways and all that, I'll let you live a long while.' "

And they claim this man said, " All right," and signed up with
him. After he signed his name the Devil disappeared. Then he
opened his eyes. He was back on earth. His people were all
crying and shouting.

He said, " What are you crying for? I'm not dead."

From then on he got well. He's a good worker too.

[178] ²³ In this account the Devil takes the place of evil power of older
[578] Chiricahua traditions and prolongs the life of the man who agrees to do his
bidding. Needless to say, the person who made these allegations is a po-
litical and social enemy of the one who is accused of " signing up " with
the Devil.